

RET 32

Ymateb gan: Comisiynydd y Gymraeg

Response from: Welsh Language Commissioner

Dear Chairperson,

Consultation: Routes into post-16 education and training

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the above consultation. One of the objectives of the Welsh Government's *Cymraeg 2050* strategy is to develop post-compulsory education provision which increases rates of progression and supports everyone, whatever their command of the language, to develop Welsh language skills for use socially and in the workplace. My response will focus on how routes into Welsh-medium post-16 education and training can be developed and strengthened further.

The importance of the post-16 education and training sector to the *Cymraeg 2050* strategy

One of the main challenges in terms of achieving the targets set out in *Cymraeg 2050* is to ensure that more young people retain their Welsh language skills and use them after leaving school. The post-compulsory education and training sector has a crucial role to play in this context. This period bridges statutory education and the world of work, and increasing opportunities for students to maintain and develop their Welsh language skills while training in more specific and specialist areas is extremely important. Not only does this offer opportunities for individuals to gain linguistic confidence, it also influences their perception of the importance of the language within the context of work in Wales. This in turn can influence wider patterns of use.

The importance of the post-16 education and training sector in creating bilingual workplaces is becoming ever clearer given that around 125 organisations across Wales

Comisiynydd y Gymraeg

Uned 2, Bloc C
Doc Fictoria
Caernarfon
LL55 1TH

0345 6033 221

post@comisiynyddygybraeg.cymru

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg

comisiynyddygybraeg.cymru

Welsh Language Commissioner

Unit 2, Block C
Victoria Dock
Caernarfon
LL55 1TH

0345 6033 221

post@comisiynyddygybraeg.cymru

Correspondence welcomed in Welsh and English

welshlanguagecommissioner.wales

are now subject to the Welsh language standards regime. These include some of the biggest employers in Wales and there is no doubt that the standards regime is responsible for a substantial increase in the demand for individuals who can work bilingually. Critical to meeting this increasing demand will be to ensure that the education sector creates a workforce with sufficient Welsh language skills, distributed strategically across and within different organisations.

Research report on the views and experiences of post-16 learners in bilingual or Welsh-medium education

In November 2023 we published a research [report](#) on the views and experiences of post-16 learners in bilingual or Welsh-medium education in schools and further education colleges across Wales. The research demonstrated very clearly the importance of the Welsh language to learners in Wales. It was noted that opportunities to study through the medium of Welsh are important to Welsh speakers when choosing a place of study, as well as opportunities to use Welsh as part of everyday life at school or college. It was also shown that learners see the language as an advantage for their career prospects.

However, the research also highlights many of the barriers that exist to Welsh-medium post-16 education and training provision. Concerns were raised in terms of the main reasons cited by learners for not choosing to study subjects through the medium of Welsh, including a lack of Welsh-medium provision and a lack of confidence in their Welsh language skills compared to their English language skills. The lack of Welsh-medium provision in some areas remains a clear obstacle.

Another common reason given for not studying through the medium of Welsh was a perception amongst learners that their further studies were likely to be in English or that there were better study prospects in English, in their opinion. This underlines the need to raise awareness of the opportunities available to learners to use their Welsh language skills as they continue with their education and move into the world of work, including the benefits of doing so. This should be done as part of the package of information about education and training options, career support and work experience offered to young people, by schools, post-compulsory education and training providers and Careers Wales.

The research also raised questions about the possibility that providing more opportunities to study through the medium of Welsh could be a way of increasing the number that choose to continue to study in Wales and reduce the number of skilled young people who leave the country. Of the Welsh speakers who intended to continue their education after leaving school or college, only 40% intended to stay in Wales.

What the statistics show us about routes into Welsh-medium post-16 education and training

It is very difficult to compare the post-16 sector directly with the statutory sector in terms of numbers and percentages studying through the medium of Welsh or bilingually. However, the data suggests quite a substantial reduction in the numbers who study a significant proportion of their education through the medium of Welsh in the post-16 sector compared to the statutory sector. This is particularly true amongst learners who move to study in further education colleges or undertake work-based learning.

For example, in 2021/22, 18% of Year 11 pupils were registered for the Welsh First Language GCSE. Seventy-one per cent of these pupils were registered for at least five other Level 1 or 2 qualifications through the medium of Welsh.¹ It can be calculated therefore that around 13% of pupils study a significant proportion of their education through the medium of Welsh.

Welsh Government statistics on Welsh-medium and bilingual learning activities in post-16 education during 2021/22 reveal that 5.3% of learning activities were undertaken through the medium of Welsh.² Four and a half per cent of the learning activities were in the 'bilingual' or 'significant learning through the medium of Welsh' categories, and 9.9% were in the 'small amount of Welsh-medium learning' category. Of note is the fact that 15.9% of learning activities within sixth forms were undertaken through the medium of Welsh, but only 0.2% in further education and 0.5% in work-based learning.

The latest data for the further education and work-based learning sector shows a slight increase in Welsh-medium and bilingual learning activities (see appendices 1 and 2). However, the overall increase in bilingual and Welsh-medium provision is based mainly on an increase in learning activities which include a 'small amount of Welsh-medium learning'. Whilst we would not wish to underestimate the significance of this increase, it must be ensured that more learners continue to follow a more significant proportion of their studies through the medium of Welsh as they move into post-16 education and training.

In this context, it is very important to acknowledge the substantial work undertaken since the role of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol was extended to that of a recognised strategic body for developing the Welsh language across the higher education, further education and work-based learning sectors. For example, in 2019 the *Further Education and Apprenticeship Welsh-medium Action Plan* was published. The plan sets out short-term, medium-term and long-term actions in relation to six key strategic areas, including increasing staffing capacity, improving provision and expanding resources. These developments are to be welcomed and provide a foundation for further developments as the Coleg and Medr work together moving forward. In this context we

¹ Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) – see the *Cymraeg 2050* annual report for a brief breakdown of the data, pages 18 and 19. [Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers - Annual report 2022-23](#)

² [Ad-hoc statistical requests: 19 to 30 June 2023 | GOV.WALES](#)

welcomed the fact that a draft of Medr's first strategic plan included developing Welsh language provision as one of the five strategic aims. We also supported Medr's commitment to developing a national plan to increase opportunities for learning and assessment through the medium of Welsh. We look forward to working with Medr, who intend to use a collaborative approach to develop Welsh language provision across the tertiary education sector, with a special role for the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

Schools, further education colleges and recent policy direction

Historically, sixth form provision in Welsh-medium and bilingual schools has been crucial to efforts to maintain and develop the Welsh language skills of pupils of post-compulsory education age. As proved by the data above, sixth form Welsh-medium provision is much stronger than what has been offered by the vast majority of post-compulsory education providers in further education colleges.

As well as strengthening provision in the further education sector, therefore, careful consideration must be given to how to support and build on provision in Welsh-medium and bilingual schools. Careful consideration must be given to the role that Welsh-medium and bilingual schools will play in the post-compulsory education landscape of the future. This should include planning and collaboration at a regional level between schools and further education colleges to ensure that sufficient provision is available and that it is promoted in order to increase the number of post-16 learners in Welsh-medium education across Wales. It is crucial that this strategic planning happens for the benefit of the Welsh language, and strengthens the sound provision delivered currently in schools.

The accessibility and geography of Welsh-medium post-16 provision

Welsh-medium education remains a more difficult and onerous option to the majority of the population of Wales. In other words, overall, there are much fewer Welsh-medium schools compared to English-medium schools and, on average, it is more likely that an English-medium school would be the easiest and closest option for the majority of the population. This is particularly true in the context of post-compulsory education and training, where there is less provision in general and less Welsh-medium provision in particular. The situation varies across Wales but undoubtedly, the geography of Welsh-medium post-16 education provision makes it less accessible and acts as a barrier to a number of learners.

Transport to post-16 education

Linked to the above points, as there is less Welsh-medium provision, learners live further away from provision on average. This means that, in many areas, attending post-16 education or training involves travelling further, which is also likely to lead to financial implications. While local authorities are required to provide transport to statutory education (subject to specific distance thresholds), post-16 transport is provided on a discretionary basis. Transport policies vary from one local authority to

another, but we know that a number of local authorities do not provide free transport to post-compulsory education and training. This often has a disproportionate impact on learners wishing to attend Welsh-medium education. We know of several examples where further education colleges offer free transport for learners, but the local authority does not provide transport to the sixth form that provides Welsh-medium education.

The Commissioner has called on the Government to consider committing to providing free transport to Welsh-medium post-16 education, as part of a wider commitment to provide free transport to post-16 education in general. This would facilitate access to Welsh-medium and bilingual education and provide crucial support for families. To achieve the Government's targets for Welsh-medium education, ensuring equitable access, by arranging convenient transport, is critical.

Welsh-medium qualifications

The lack of Welsh-medium qualifications poses a challenge and means that Welsh-medium learners do not have access to the same range of qualification options as their peers in the English-medium sector. Qualifications Wales requires that those qualifications approved by them are available for assessment in Welsh and in English. Therefore, all post-16 qualifications in subjects designed specifically for Wales are available bilingually. However, there is no requirement to provide qualifications which fall outside this range, designated by Qualifications Wales, in Welsh. As a result, many qualifications for learners in Wales are delivered in English only. Qualifications Wales has a strategy to increase the availability of Welsh-medium qualifications and developments in this direction should be supported.

Higher education study patterns

The latest data from Welsh Government on the cross-border flow of full-time students supports the results of our research report on student aspirations in terms of choosing a university location. In 2020/21, 62% of undergraduate and postgraduate students from Wales went to universities in Wales while 37% went to universities in England. In the same year, 95% of students from England went to universities in England and 95% of students from Scotland went to universities in Scotland. This demonstrates that a substantial percentage of students from Wales leave their country to study, compared to students from England and Scotland. This has implications in terms of the numbers who will continue to study through the medium of Welsh, as well as their ability and the likelihood that they will work through the medium of Welsh in the future. We are not aware of any data that tracks the proportion of these students who return to Wales after graduating. This situation should be considered in the context of the Government's Seren Academy and how to offer support to our most able learners to maintain and develop their Welsh language skills and pursue a career in Wales.

The work done by the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol in the higher education sector, in conjunction with universities, has contributed to improving the situation of the Welsh language in the sector and increasing the number of students studying through the medium of Welsh. However, the latest Government data on the Welsh language in

higher education is concerning. According to the data, 10,470 fluent Welsh speakers, which account for 14% of Welsh domiciled students, were enrolled with higher education providers here in 2021/22.³ Only 3,065 fluent Welsh speakers studied some of their course through the medium of Welsh and 7,405 fluent Welsh speakers did not study any part of their course through the medium of Welsh. This data shows clearly that one of the main challenges still is to persuade students to take advantage of the provision available.

The Welsh Language and Education Bill

The Government has introduced the Welsh Language and Education Bill, with the aim of ensuring that all learners in Wales, by the end of their period of compulsory education, are independent Welsh language users. The post-16 education and training sector should plan for the increase in the Welsh language skills of young people across Wales that will follow on from the proposed legislation. As stated in *Cymraeg 2050*, “post-compulsory education and training providers have a key role to play in sustaining learners’ Welsh language skills to meet the growing need for a bilingual workforce”. Medr will have a central role in coordinating this work, specifically by drawing up a national plan for the Welsh language. Medr will also be able to use its regulatory framework to impose requirements on providers in the context of the Welsh language, along with a number of other aspects.

One of the cornerstones of the Bill is to develop a Welsh language continuum as a means of defining, describing and recording learners’ linguistic achievement. There may be an opportunity for the post-16 education and training sector to adopt the continuum in order to ensure that young people continue to develop their Welsh language skills. There should be clear routes into Welsh-medium provision and bilingual provision which maintains and develops learners’ Welsh language skills through the post-compulsory sector.

I hope that the above comments will be of assistance to the consultation.

Yours faithfully,



Efa Gruffudd Jones
Welsh Language Commissioner

³ [Welsh Language in Higher Education, 2021/22](#)

Appendix 1: Learning activities by medium of delivery in further education, excluding work-based learning, Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government⁴⁵

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Welsh only	0.1% 690	0.3% 1265	0.3% 985	0.2% 755	0.3% 880	0.3% 915	0.3% 890	0.1% 410	0.07% 250
Bilingual	3% 13,730	2.3% 8,755	1.1% 3,875	2.9% 10,010	2% 6,810	2.7% 7,890	3% 9,005	2.6% 8,410	2.5% 8,355
Significant amount of Welsh-medium learning	0.6% 2,810	0.8% 3,020	0.4% 1,570	0.7% 2,325	1.3% 4,425	1.0% 2,885	0.8% 2,405	1% 3,375	1.4% 5,185
Small amount of Welsh-medium learning	3.5% 16,040	3.9% 15,145	2.8% 9,880	3.5% 12,160	5.3% 18,490	5.0% 14,690	6.8% 20,060	9.3% 30,410	10.5% 38,125
English only	92.8% 431,620	92.7% 355,530	95.4 337,680	92.7% 322,910	90.1% 313,190	90.3% 265,505	87.8% 259,380	86% 279,845	85% 308,690
Welsh and bilingual - total	7.2%	7.3%	4.6%	7.3%	8.9%	9%	10.9%	13%	14.5%

⁴ [Learning activities by medium of delivery and provider type in further education, excluding work-based learning](#)

⁵ The public data available on StatsWales is somewhat different to the data included in the *Cymraeg 2050* annual reports and the data referred to on page 3 of our response above.

Appendix 2: Learning activities by medium of delivery in work-based learning, Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government ⁶

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Welsh only	0.3% 620	0.4% 685	0.3% 515	0.3% 520	0.4% 565	0.5% 675	0.8% 945	0.7% 750	0.6% 710
Bilingual	3.4% 6,475	3.1% 5,045	3.2% 5,135	2.9% 4,850	2.9% 4,305	2.9% 3,620	3% 3,730	2.9% 3,065	3% 3,640
Significant amount of Welsh-medium learning	0.2% 325	0.3% 415	0.3% 465	0.3% 530	0.3% 435	0.3% 380	0.4% 555	0.6% 595	0.5% 580
Small amount of Welsh-medium learning	3.2% 6,110	4.7% 7,675	6.9% 10,945	6.7% 11,010	8.3% 12,355	9.3% 11,495	13.3% 16,525	19.5% 20,450	25.5% 30,325
English only	92.8 174,875	91.5% 148,665	89.3% 142,285	89.3% 147,775	88.1% 130,455	87.0% 107,850	82.5% 102,239	76.3% 79,810	70% 83,210
Welsh and bilingual - total	7.2%	8.5%	10.7%	10.3%	11.9%	13.0%	17.5%	23.7%	29.6%

⁶ [Learning activities by medium of delivery and provider type in work-based learning](#)